

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 3822

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, CASC, NI

SUBJECT: AIG CASE: DETENTION OF LEFEVRE AND EGBE

1. I DISCUSSED THE LEFEVRE CASE WITH NEW AIIC DIRECTOR RITTER LAST EVENING, SATURDAY MARCH 24. I EXPLAINED THAT CONSUL HUFFMAN WAS STILL BLOCKED FROM ACCESS TO THE IKOYI JAIL WHILE MEA CONSULAR CHIEF FABUNMI ENDEAVORED ON AN EASTER WEEKEND TO OBTAIN OFFICIAL AUTHORIZATION FOR SUCH A VISIT. HUFFMAN WAS SEEING FABUNMI ON A VIRTUAL TWICE-A-DAY BASIS IN PURSUIT OF SUCH AUTHORIZATION, BUT I TOLD RITTER I FELT IT WAS MEANWHILE ESSENTIAL THAT WE DEVISE SOME OTHER TACTIC FOR SEEING LEFEVRE. I TOLD RITTER I WAS PUZZLED THAT LEFEVRE'S WIFE CAROLE HAD NOT YET TRIED TO VISIT LEFEVRE IN JAIL. RITTER SAID THAT NEITHER HE NOR CAROLE HAD DONE SO BECAUSE EGBE'S LAWYERS HAD ADVISED "THAT IT WOULD NOT WORK AND THAT THEY WOULD ONLY BE HUMILIATED" BY PRISON AND POLICE OFFICIALS." IN ADDITION, RITTER SAID THE ONLY WAY EGBE'S LAWYERS GOT IN WAS TO PAY THEIR WAY WITH LIBERAL "DASH" TO PEOPLE WHOM THEY KNEW. I TOLD RITTER I WOULD SEND ECONOMIC OFFICER PEASHOCK WITH HIM AND/OR CAROLE TO TEST THE WATERS.

2. RITTER AND PEASHOCK WENT DIRECTLY TO THE JAIL, WHERE THEY WERE VIRTUALLY IMMEDIATELY GIVEN ACCESS TO LEFEVRE AND EGBE IN A WAITING ROOM. BOTH MEN WERE IN GOOD SPIRITS AND SAID THEY WERE BEING WELL TREATED IN THE "VIP SECTION" OF THE

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JAIL (ALTHOUGH THEY WERE IN REASONABLY CLOSE PROXIMITY TO TWENTY-ONE NIGERIANS). PEASHOCK ASKED LEFEVRE AND EGBE TO CLARIFY WHETHER BOTH OF THEM OR ONLY EGBE HAD BEEN OFFERED BAIL. THEY CONFIRMED THE EMBASSY'S ORIGINAL REPORT THAT BOTH HAD BEEN OFFERED BAIL. WHEN THE PROSECUTION THEN CRITICIZED THE BAIL OFFER AS ENABLING EGBE AND LEFEVRE TO COVER THE TRACES OF THEIR GUILT OR INTERFERE WITH THE INVESTI-

GATION, EGBE AND LEFEVRE HUDDLED TOGETHER AND DECIDED TO REFLECT THE OFFER.

3. EGBE'S LEGAL ASSOCIATES HAVE NOW OBTAINED A NEW BAIL OFFER SIGNED BY THE CHIEF JUSTICE (PRESUMABLY OF LAGOS STATE). THIS OFFER IS TO BE REVIEWED IN A MAGISTRATE'S COURT HEARING ON TUESDAY MORNING MARCH 28. CONSUL HUFFMAN WILL ATTEND. IF THE MAGISTRATE APPROVES AS EGBE'S ASSOCIATES EXPECT HE WILL, THEN EGBE AND LEFEVRE HAVE ANOTHER CHANCE TO GET OUT OF JAIL. THEY TOLD PEASHOCK AND RITTER THEY'LL NOT LET PRIDE STAND IN THEIR WAY THIS TIME. (COMMENT: WE'RE NOT YET SUFFICIENTLY VERSED IN NIGERIAN LAW TO UNDERSTAND WHY THIS NEW BAIL PROCEDURE IS NECESSARY; WHY COULD NOT THE FIRST OFFER SIMPLY BE RENEWED WITHOUT BRINGING THE CHIEF JUSTICE INTO THE ACT?)

4. MEANWHILE HUFFMAN SAW FABUNMI AGAIN LAST EVENING AND WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED TO FIND THAT FABUNMI WAS MAKING PROGRESS IN OBTAINING OFFICIAL VISITOR'S PERMISSION FOR HIM. HUFFMAN IS SEEING FABUNMI AGAIN TODAY AND WILL EXPRESS MY PERSONAL DISMAY AT CONTINUED DELAY IN AUTHORIZING HIS VISIT.

5. ACCORDING TO RITTER, THE CHARGE BROUGHT AGAINST LEFEVRE AND EGBE WAS THAT OF "CONSPIRACY TO STEAL." THE ARGUMENT APPEARENTLY RUNS SOMETHING AS FOLLOWS: UNDER LEFEVRE'S GENERAL SUPERVISION OR INSTRUCTION AND ON EGBE'S ADVICE AS AIIC LEGAL

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COUNSEL, THE COMPANY LOANED 450,000 NAIRA TO A NIGERIAN CONSTRUCTION COMPANY IN WHICH EGBE HAD A FINANCIAL INTEREST. THE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY OFFERED TWO BUILDINGS AS COLLATERAL, BUT THE MONEY WAS ILLEGALLY PUT INTO AN ESCROW FUND (DRAWING TEN PERCENT INTEREST) BEFORE THE BUILDINGS HAD BEEN PROPERLY REREGISTERED TO AIIC AS THE NEW FIRST MORTGAGE HOLDER. THE PROSECUTION APPARENTLY BELIEVES IT CAN OBTAIN A CONFLICT OF INTEREST FINDING AGAINST EGBE, AND CAN IMPUTE GUILT TO LEFEVRE FOR PERMITTING THE DEAL TO GO THROUGH PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE REQUIRED PAPER WORK (REREGISTRATION). (COMMENT: THIS IS OUR LAYMAN'S INTERPRETATION OF WHAT RITTER HAS TOLD US. WE WILL TRY TO BUILD A CLEARER PICTURE AS WE OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION.)

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